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AUTHOR Tortelli, James P.
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses six instructional techniques for strengthening strategies of comprehending written language: the language experience approach to develop awareness of the sensible nature of language; story-division to strengthen semantic prediction; reader-illustrations to develop thought units; paragraph-analysis to reduce uncertainty; literal terms to apprehend inferences; and audio-self-monitoring to strengthen correction of nonsensical substitutions. It is argued that a diagnostic prescriptive approach to instruction involves the focusing upon and utilization of comprehension. Such an approach seeks to discover what readers have comprehended from previous instruction and experience and prescribe lessons to intensify and extend strategies used for comprehending. (TS)

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Dr. James P. Tortelli
Detroit Public Schools
621 Orleans, Apt. #52
Detroit, Mich. 48220

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COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES FOR INSTRUCTION

Comprehension plays a vital role in diagnostic-prescriptive reading instruction. It is what the readers bring to the instructional process, i.e., experience; what enables them to participate in the instructional process, i.e., thinking; and what they acquire from reading instruction, i.e., knowledge.

A diagnostic focus on the experiental perspective provides information concerning the quantity and quality of information and skills that readers already have about the content of written language and their means for processing it. A prescriptive focus upon the thinking perspective provides information enabling the development of guidelines for construction of lessons to strengthen the strategies readers use to gain information from written language. Thirdly, an evaluative focus upon the knowledge perspective provides information as to what readers have actually acquired from these lessons and, in turn, yields diagnostic information for the construction of future lessons.

Instructional techniques for strenthening strategies of comprehending written language are the use of 1)the language experience approach to develop awareness of the sensible nature of language; 2)story-division to strengthen semantic prediction; 3)reader-illustrations to develop thought units; 4)paragraph-

analysis to reduce uncertainty; 5)literal terms to apprehend inferences; and 6)audio-self-monitoring to strengthen correction of nonsensical substitutions.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGY ONE: Use of Language Experience Approach to Develop Awareness of the Sensible Nature of Language.

To make sense of written language, readers need to become aware of the integral relationship of thought and language. Such awareness facilitates the application of their knowledge of language as speakers to reading written language. Awareness of this relationship is developed by applying the language experience approach to reading instruction.

To do this, readers are presented with objects of interest which they handle and examine. Next, they describe their experience to their teacher, who records the experiences in the language the readers use. Readers then read aloud what the teacher has recorded.

Thus, experiences are developed, expressed in speech, recorded in writing, and read orally. Readers are led from the experiential development of comprehension to telling what they comprehend to reading what they comprehend. They discover that written language is not merely a conglomeration of scribbled marks, but the expression of thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGY TWO: Use of Story Division to Strengthen the Strategy of Semantic Prediction.

Once readers are aware of the sensible nature of written language, instruction needs to focus upon its predictability. Instruction needs to strengthen readers' use of their experiences to formulate intelligent "guesses" as to what will next occur in a narrative. Predicting what will occur next in a story establishes a purpose for reading the remainder of that story by arousing readers' curiosity as to the accuracy of their "guesses". As readers' predictions are proven to be correct, awareness of a theme begins to develop. As awareness of thematic development occurs, the awareness of the logical continuity of written language is both intensified and extended.

To use story-division effectively, a narrative should be divided into open-ended segments. Each segment should contain sufficient information to provide readers with the understanding that some event is about to occur-but not enough information to understand what it will be nor how it will take place. Readers record their predictions and reasons for them in writing. They read the succeeding segment to discover what event the author had in mind and compare their version with the author's version. If differences occur, discussion of those differences results

in the evaluation of written language and the author's point of view. This procedure continues throughout the entire story, strengthening readers' abilities to predict forthcoming events using semantic cues.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGY THREE: Use of Reader-Illustrations to Develop Thought Units.

Once readers are comprehending portions of a plot and predicting forthcoming events, a relationship between segments of a narrative begins to emerge. Instruction is now needed to help readers relate not only events in immediate proximity, but introductory and concluding events as well. They need instruction that enables them to conceptualize the underlying structure of the narrative, i.e., how the events are related to one another. This strategy of unifying bits of information is strengthened by the use of non-linguistic reader illustrations.

To accomplish this, the concept load of a given narrative should be reduced by dividing the plot of the original story into several major events. Each division should contain sufficient information as to the characters and happenings involved in that particular division so as to be complete within itself. Readers next read and illustrate each division. When the entire narrative has been read and illustrated, the story is reread

and the illustrations reexamined to note semantic similarities. When the process is completed,, readers draw one illustration that describes the main idea of the entire story.

This technique reduces the amount of written language and embodied thought which readers must process at any given time, allowing the focusing of attention upon the significant information contained within each portion of the narrative and more effectively comprehending it. By illustrating what is read, the readers are able to express what was comprehened in non-linguistic terms, thereby not being restricted by difficulties in spelling. By rereading and reexamining the illustrations, readers perceive the relationship of events expressed in written language. This reduces the memory load and facilitates perception of similarities, leading to a more thorough understanding of the theme or plot.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGY FOUR: Use of Paragraph-Analysis to Reduce Semantic Uncertainty.

Once readers become aware of the continuity of meaning in written language and discern the differences in value of the information contained within it, they are ready for instruction in the use of contextual cues. The realization that a message is being conveyed in written form-and certain aspects of that form (nouns and verbs) contain more significant information that other

aspects (prepositions and conjunctions)-prepares readers to detect the meaning of unfamiliar terms by using the meaning of familiar words surrounding them. Strategy instruction is needed to help readers deliberately utilize apprehended contextual meaning to reduce the uncertainty of unfamiliar terms and gain more information from the total passage. Instruction in paragraph analysis strengthens this strategy of reading.

Paragraph-analysis is most effective when employed initially with descriptive paragraph. Descriptive paragraphs are those paragraphs designed to describe the characteristics of a particular person, place, or thing. All the sentences focus upon the one topic. Initially, the papagraphs should be written in familiar language about a familiar topic. During the succeeding stages, the papagraphs should be written in familiar language about less familiar topics.

Readers are directed to locate and underline each word that refers to the main topic of the paragraph and circle the name of that topic. When all the cues to the meaning of the term have been discovered, readers incoporate the descriptive term into an illustration and label that illustration with the name of the topic of the paragraph.

This technique strengthens the strategy of locating information

in surrounding context to determine the meaning of an unknown term. The illustration facilitates relating each familiar term to the other, to develop an understanding of the unfamiliar topis.

Following is a sample lesson demonstrating this technique begining with familiar language and extending to unfamiliar language:

Directions: Read paragraph. Underline the name of the animal. Circle the words that tell what the animal looks like. Draw a picture of the animal. Write the name of the animal beneath the picture.

A. Once upon a time there was a kitten. She was very small. The fur on her body was very soft. Her head, body, and legs were covered with this black, shiny fur. But her paws were white and there was a spot of white on the tip of her tail. She was a very pretty kitten.

B. At the farm Carol saw a ewe with her lamb. She was covered with thick, white wool. Her tail looked like a small, wooly ball. But her legs almost looked naked because the hair on her four legs was not as thick and wooly as the hair on her body. The ewe appeared to be

glad to see Carol and said "baa" when Carol came near her. Carol understood that this was the mother sheep's way of welcoming her. She was happy too and patted the ewe on her head between her two short pointed ears.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGY FIVE: Use of Literal Termsto Apprehend Inferences.

Once readers are comprehending the literal meaning of written language, instrucrion is needed to strengthen apprehension and utilization of inferential meanings to make rational judgements while reading. This extension of thought beyond the obvious, literal interpretation of language requires readers to use information acquired through experience.

Strategy instruction for this purpose involves the use of incomplete sentences containing familiar vocabulary in unfamiliar combinations. This requires readers to note particular semantic cues while reading and relate them in an unfamiliar manner to develop new concepts. Readers circle the cues and select one of several possible alternatives to complete the sentences. This task forces the readers to use both linguistic and experiential information to complete sentences and supply reasons for their selections.

A sample lesson designed to strengthen this reading

strategy focuses upon food for birds. Information is contained within each sentence concernin g the name and habitat of each bird. The task is to infer from the type of habitat what food that particular bird would most likely eat. An example is the following:

Bird's Homes and Food

1. A Roadrunner lives in the desert and eats _____.
2. A Bald-headed Eagle lives near the ocean and eats _____.
3. A Carolina Parakeet lives near farms and eats _____.
4. A Wild Turkey lives in the woods and eats _____.

Word Bank

lizards fish corn insects

While words are familiar to the readers, the relationship between birds, their habitats, and their food is neither familiar nor obvious. To complete the sentences correctly, readers must reflect upon the conditions and characteristics of each habitat and type of food and match the two. The written language itself is easily comprehended. The focus of the lesson is upon inferential thought and its application.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGY SIX: Use of Audio-Monitoring to strengthen Self-Correction of Nonsensical Substitutions.

Once readers perceive that written language makes sense,

they need instruction to strengthen their strategies of correction. While not all misreadings interfere with language making sense, many do and need to be changed. In many instances, readers are unaware of the specific misreadings that distort the meaning of a total passage and need to hear themselves reading orally in order to detect and correct them. Such an informative, self-correcting process is involved in audio-self-monitoring.

Audio -self-monitoring requires readers to read unfamiliar language orally for a tape recorder. The tapes are replayed while readers reread the material silently, noting nonsensical substitutions. They correct these subsitutions with either the intended readings or substitutions with similar meaning-i.e., substitutions that make sense. Once corrections have been made, readers replay their oral readings and reread silently the original material, noting increases in meaning.

This strategy enables readers to note specific misreadings that disrupt the meaning of the narrative and correct them by supplying words that do make sense. Thus, a reason is perceived for correction and a means developed to employ it.

Taking a diagnostic-prescriptive approach to instruction involves the focussing upon and utilization of comprehension. Such an approach seeks to discover what readers have comprehended

from previous instruction and experience and prescribe lessons to intensify and extend strategies used for comprehending.

Those lessons may begin with the development of the awareness of the sensible predictible nature of written language and extend to the development of larger thought units. Thus, reducing uncertainty, apprehending infrences, and strengthening the correction of misreadings interfering with comprehension.

Diagnostic-prescriptive reading instruction is, in essence, the utilization of comprehension to comprehend more.

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